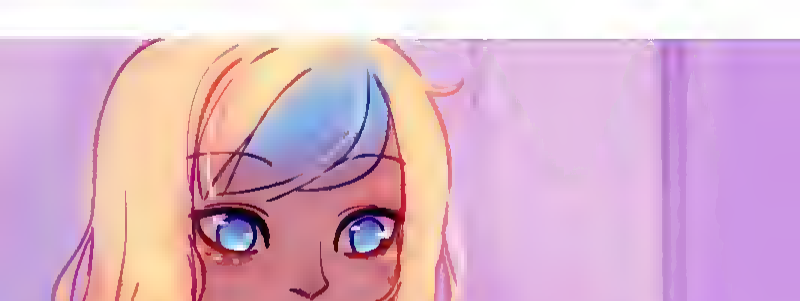

AUSTEN?

HEY SUNATI,
. . . ARE YOU OKAY?

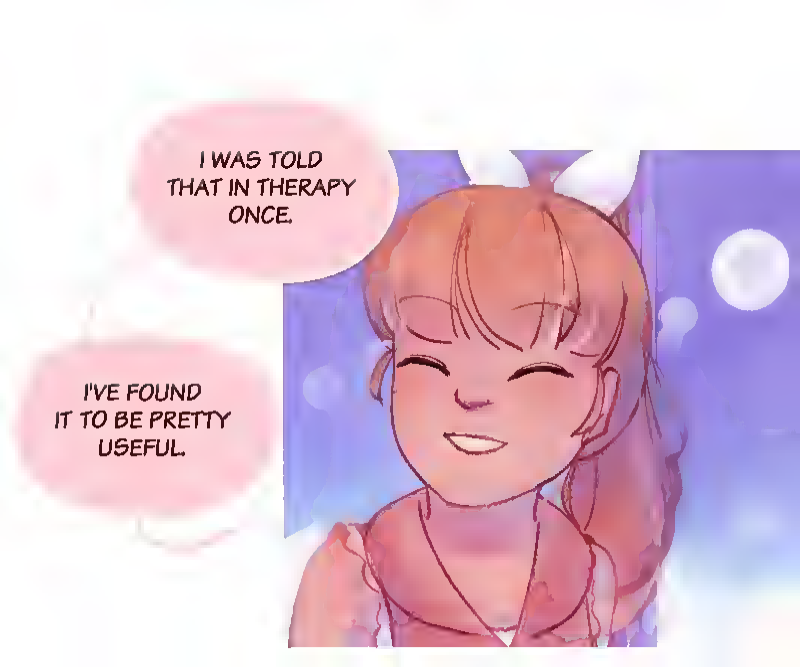
ALWAYS HUMAN

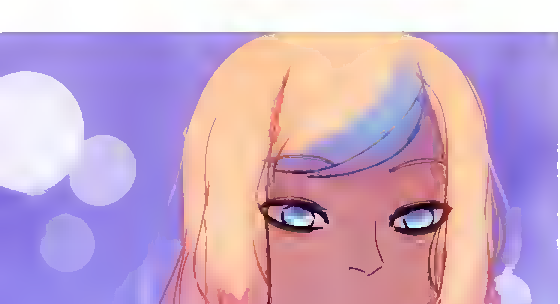
43 - Rely on me a little bit

WOW, PERU
IT'S A BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY.
...
SEE?
THAT'S HOW I SHOULD BE RESPONDING.

SHE'S MY BEST FRIEND.
AND THIS IS LITERALLY A DREAM COME TRUE FOR HER.
WHY CAN'T I JUST BE HAPPY?
WHY CAN'T I TURN OFF THE VOICE IN THE BACK OF MY HEAD THAT DOESN'T WANT HER TO GO?

YOU KNOW, IT'S OKAY TO HAVE CONTRADICTORY THOUGHTS.
IT'S EVEN OKAY TO HAVE THOUGHTS THAT YOU DON'T LIKE.
PEOPLE ARE COMPLICATED
DON'T BEAT YOURSELF UP OVER IT.


I WAS TOLD THAT IN THERAPY ONCE.
I'VE FOUND IT TO BE PRETTY USEFUL.



SO
THAT VOICE WILL NEVER GO AWAY THEN?
WILL I KEEP FEELING LIKE THIS FOREVER?
I DON'T KNOW.
MAYBE YOU SHOULD TRY TALKING TO RAE ABOUT IT.

...

HOW CAN I?
HOW DO I TELL RAE THAT I WANT HER TO ACHIEVE ALL HER DREAMS
BUT I ALSO DON'T WANT HER TO LEAVE

THERE'S NO WAY TO SAY THAT WITHOUT SOUNDING LIKE A JERK.

HOW ABOUT
" I'LL MISS YOU. "

HAVE YOU TRIED SAYING THAT?

OH.

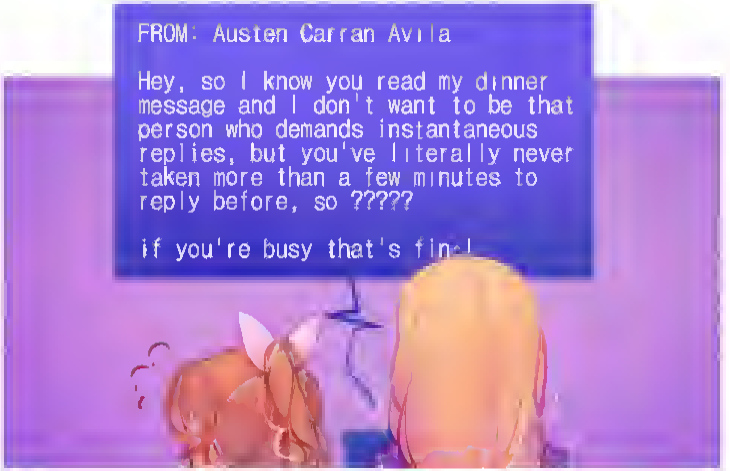
I DIDN'T SAY THAT, DID I?

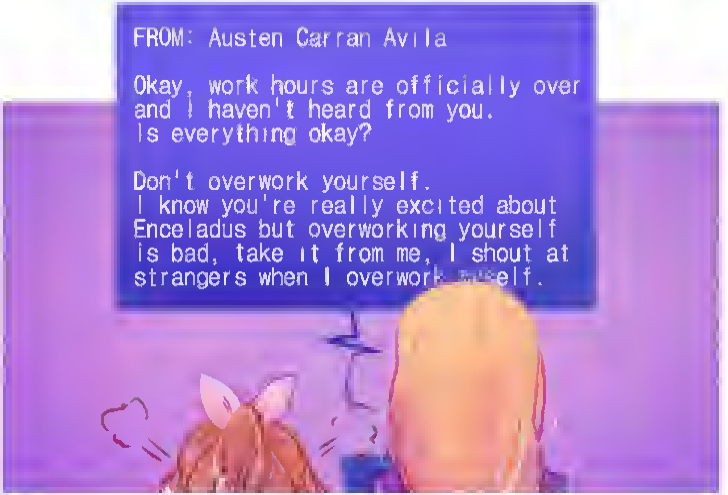
WHY... WHY DIDN'T I?

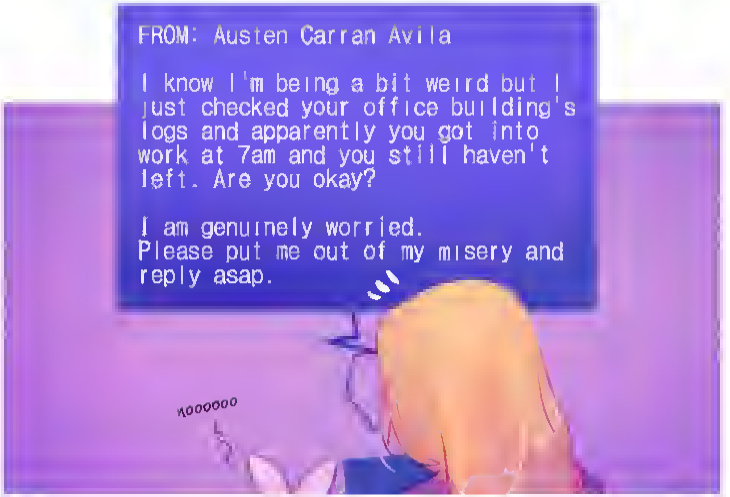
THANK YOU.
I THINK THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I NEED TO SAY.

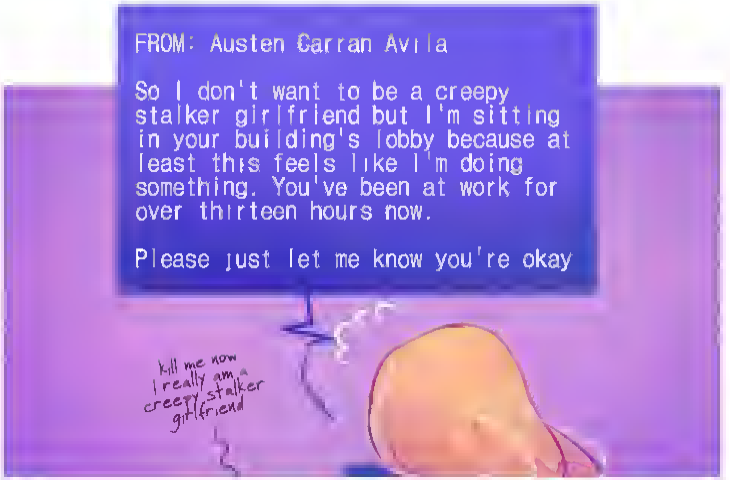
I'M REALLY GLAD YOU'RE HERE.
I'M FEELING SO MUCH BETTER NOW.
??
WAIT, WHY ARE YOU HERE ANYWAY?
??

oh noooo
YOU HAVEN'T CHECKED YOUR MESSAGES IN A WHILE, HAVE YOU?
UM, NO?


FROM: Austen Carran Avila
Hey, so I know you read my dinner message and I don't want to be that person who demands instantaneous replies, but you've literally never taken more than a few minutes to reply before, so ?????
if you're busy that's fine


FROM: Austen Carran Avila
Okay, work hours are officially over and I haven't heard from you. Is everything okay?
Don't overwork yourself. I know you're really excited about Enceladus but overworking yourself is bad, take it from me, I shout at strangers when I overwork myself.


FROM: Austen Carran Avila
I know I'm being a bit weird but I just checked your office building's logs and apparently you got into work at 7am and you still haven't left. Are you okay?
I am genuinely worried.
Please put me out of my misery and reply asap.
xoooooo


FROM: Austen Carran Avila
So I don't want to be a creepy stalker girlfriend but I'm sitting in your building's lobby because at least this feels like I'm doing something. You've been at work for over thirteen hours now.
Please just let me know you're okay
kill me now I really am a creepy stalker girlfriend

I'M SO SORRY FOR FREAKING OUT ON YOU.
NO I'M SORRY!
I'M SO SORRY I MADE YOU WORRY.
I REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO TROUBLE YOU.

GLARE
?
?
?

NO.
YOU'RE WRONG.
I WANT YOU TO TROUBLE ME.

IF YOU NEED TO TALK THEN I WANT TO LISTEN.
IF YOU NEED A HAND THEN I WANT YOU TO USE MINE.

I'M YOUR GIRLFRIEND, RIGHT?
SO RELY ON ME A LITTLE BIT.

OKAY
ALRIGHT
THEN

I WILL.

Thank you for reading!

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PATREON.COM/WALKINGNORTH